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Lezione 8 (16/4/2015) **"Fair trade and food market: sovranità alimentare e biodiversità"**

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DISPENSA A CURA DELL'ASSOCIAZIONE LAPSUS

ABSTRACT

FAIR TRADE and FOOD MARKET: Biodiversità e Sovranità Alimentare

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Attualmente il nostro mondo soffre ancora la fame. Sono più di 800 milioni le persone che vivono con meno di un dollaro al giorno e (anche) per questo non hanno denaro a sufficienza per comprare il cibo che serve loro a sopravvivere.

La fame che lascia a pancia vuota questo esercito di individui non è legata alla carenza di alimenti, ma al fatto che il cibo non è accessibile, costa troppo rispetto a quanto le persone guadagnano ogni giorno. La produzione alimentare mondiale sarebbe oggi in grado di fornire ad ogni individuo il doppio delle calorie giornaliere necessarie al suo sostentamento.

La crisi alimentare che stiamo vivendo non è un evento inaspettato, legato ai maggiori consumi di Cina o India, ma ha radici forti, lontane qualche decennio: è il risultato del mercato delle materie prime agricole che è stato sviluppato in tutto il mondo a partire dagli anni '80, uno schema globale che ha smantellato sistemi agricoli regionali, autosufficienti, in nome dell'efficienza produttiva e dello sviluppo. Le conseguenze sono purtroppo davanti ai nostri occhi, un mercato del cibo altamente inefficiente, in cui il grande paradosso è che a soffrire la fame sono soprattutto coloro che vivono nelle aree rurali e lavorano per produrre quello che arriva sulle nostre tavole. Incapaci di muoversi nel sistema di produzione e commercializzazione alimentare che abbiamo costruito, contadini e piccoli produttori vengono privati dei diritti fondamentali alla sopravvivenza: diritto alla terra, diritto ad un salario dignitoso, ma soprattutto diritto al cibo. Il diritto al cibo è il diritto umano fondamentale: senza la possibilità di alimentarsi adeguatamente viene meno lo stesso diritto alla vita. Per questo le Nazioni Unite l'hanno sancito fin dal 1948 nella Dichiarazione

Universale dei Diritti Umani, e l’hanno ribadito ponendolo al primo posto degli Obiettivi del Millennio: riduzione della metà del numero di persone che soffrono la fame entro il 2015.

Nonostante questi impegni internazionali, il numero di persone che soffre la fame e la malnutrizione nel mondo è in continuo aumento, perché le cause non sono nella natura e nei suoi eventi accidentali, ma nei disequilibri del commercio internazionale e nelle scelte
delle politiche agricole che sono state prese in questi ultimi decenni. Il Commercio Equo e Solidale rivendica il proprio ruolo di soggetto politico attivo impegnato a far conoscere le cause della fame e a proporre soluzioni concrete, in rete con tutti gli altri protagonisti dell’economia che credono in un’agricoltura ed un mercato del cibo diversi da quelli attuali.

“Consumare è un atto agricolo”. Quando facciamo la spesa noi scegliamo continuamente quale mondo preferiamo tra: un mondo dove chi produce cibo a basso costo non è in grado di mangiare e chi lo consuma lo paga molto caro, dove il modello dell’industria agroalimentare distrugge gli ecosistemi e riduce la biodiversità, dove alcuni paesi ricchi sussidiano i propri prodotti agricoli e stravolgono i mercati interni dei paesi costretti a liberalizzarli; oppure un mondo organizzato secondo i principi dello sviluppo sostenibile, basato su agricoltura biologica, piccola e media proprietà contadina delle terre, filiere alimentari eque e corte che eliminano gli intermediari inutili, qualità e sicurezza degli alimenti che abbiano un prezzo al consumatore giusto e trasparente, un sistema di regole uguali per tutti i paesi, ricchi o poveri che siano. Un mondo a misura d’uomo che garantisca il diritto al cibo e la sicurezza alimentare per tutti.

La crisi che viviamo oggi, che rende sempre più difficile il consumo di cibo e che ha determinato rivolte popolari in Asia, Africa, America Latina, purtroppo non è il frutto di cause temporanee ed impreviste, ma è il prodotto di decenni di politica agricola internazionale. L’intervento decisivo è iniziato già negli anni ’80 quando sulla scia dei fallimenti delle inefficienti burocrazie statali e del tracollo del comunismo si è deciso che il modello più efficiente per l’agricoltura – settore da cui dipende il reddito di oltre 2 miliardi di persone, in massima parte nei paesi del Sud del mondo – fosse quello che

elimina i sistemi agricoli locali chiusi e favorisce l'industrializzazione dell'agricoltura nonché l'orientamento alle esportazioni di ogni paese. Secondo il principio economico alla base di questo modello ogni paese si deve specializzare in quei settori dove possiede dei vantaggi competitivi sugli altri (il costo del lavoro, le risorse naturali, il clima, ecc.), vendere i prodotti nel mercato internazionale e ricavare valuta per acquistare i beni che altri producono ad un costo inferiore. Di questo approccio sono stati fortemente responsabili istituzioni internazionali quali la Banca Mondiale e il Fondo Monetario Internazionale, oltre all'Organizzazione per il Commercio Internazionale e molti governi di Europa e Stati Uniti.

Dimenticando che il cibo è non solo nutrimento per le persone, ma anche cultura, collante tra diversi sistemi sociali e diverse tradizioni, questo modello macroecono-mico ha contribuito alla distruzione dei sistemi agricoli regionali e ha prodotto conseguenze terribili per intere comunità, trasformando quelli che erano contadini e piccoli proprietari, spesso autosufficienti, in *senza terra* costretti al lavoro salariato nelle industrie alimentari o all'emigrazione disperata nei quartieri ghetto delle grandi città.

Da un punto di vista ambientale l'impatto è stato altrettanto radicale: interi ecosistemi, ricchi di biodiversità frutto dell'adattamento secolare al territorio, in grado di assicurare cibo secondo le stagioni locali, ma anche di produrre semi, nutrimento per animali e materiali per le abitazioni, sono stati spazzati via a favore delle monocolture estensive gestite dalle grandi multinazionali. Si sarebbe dovuto investire nel progresso scientifico per aumentare la produttività dei sistemi già esistenti e in equilibrio con l'uomo e con l'ambiente. Se ne è invece favorita la scomparsa a favore di un grande sistema agricolo globale in teoria più efficiente. Ciò che abbiamo oggi è un gigantesco meccanismo che, lungi dall'essere valido e dall'assicurare lo sviluppo economico, in realtà da un lato penalizza i produttori e i contadini a cui si nega la sicurezza alimentare, rendendoli incapaci di ricavare dal loro lavoro quanto sufficiente per mangiare, dall'altro impone ai consumatori cibi sempre più costosi e di sempre più scarsa qualità organolettica e nutritiva, frutto di processi altamente inquinanti.

Mentre molti paesi del Sud del mondo si trovano ad affrontare le tragiche conseguenze della trasformazione radicale del settore agricolo interno, con la distruzione delle reti sociali e degli ecosistemi interconnessi, i paesi ricchi del Nord continuano a rifiutare le

“ricette economiche” che loro stessi propongono. L’agricoltura di Europa e Stati Uniti non solo rimane pesantemente sussidiata, ma anche protetta dalla eventuale concorrenza dei mercati internazionali attraverso forti barriere doganali – più o meno esplicite – all’ingresso. Il sistema dei sussidi agricoli europeo fa sì ad esempio che in Ghana il concentrato di pomodoro che arriva dall’Italia costi cinque volte meno dei pomodori locali. Oppure che in Nigeria la carne più economica sia quella importata da Germania e Inghilterra. E ancora: il 67% del latte consumato in Giamaica è di provenienza europea, e gli allevatori locali devono buttare via migliaia di litri del proprio. Le conseguenze per la popolazione locale sono drammatiche. Solo 30 anni fa Haiti coltivava tutto il riso di cui aveva bisogno e aveva un adeguato allevamento di polli, nutriti dalle piantagioni di mais locale. Poi nel 1994 il Fondo Monetario Internazionale ha vincolato la concessione di un prestito allo Stato alla riduzionedelle tariffe d’importazione del riso e di altri prodotti alimentari. In pochi anni il mercato locale è stato distrutto dall’arrivo del riso proveniente dagli Usa, fortemente sussidiato dal governo americano (circa 1 miliardo di dollari all’anno). Le coltivazioni nelle campagne sono state abbandonate, i contadini si sono trasferiti in città alla ricerca di un lavoro. Haiti importa oggi 300mila tonnellate di riso all’anno dagli Stati Uniti. E da quando è iniziata la crisi dei prezzi alimentari e quello del riso è praticamente raddoppiato, per molti haitiani il dollaro al giorno che guadagnano non è più sufficiente a comperare una ciotola di riso. Gli allevamenti di pollo sono stati soppiantati dal pollo di seconda scelta che arriva ancora dagli Stati Uniti: le parti scartate dai consumatori americani, e quindi senza valore, vengono rivendute a poco prezzo neimercati di Haiti, di fatto eliminando gli allevatori locali.
A causa del sistema agricolo industriale la biodiversità sta scomparendo dal nostro pianeta. In India, 10 varietà di riso occupano oggi il 70% di un territorio su cui un tempo venivano coltivate oltre 30mila specie diverse. Qualcosa di analogo capita al mais in molte regioni dell’America Latina, come la cosiddetta “rivolta delle tortillas” di qualche anno fa ha testimoniato a livello mondiale. La biodiversità protegge da sempre l’agricoltura e la sicurezza alimentare, perché attraverso la diversificazione delle colture i raccolti sono meno a rischio di siccità, malattie delle piante, degrado del terreno e

dell’ambiente. Inoltre, un’agricoltura diversificata produce cibo più vario e più sano. L’agricoltura industriale e la
coltivazione di ogm distruggono la biodiversità del pianeta e ci espongono sempre più al pericolo della fame.
I contadini, un tempo guardiani della fertilità della terra e dei suoi frutti, sono oggi costretti ad acquistare i semi transgenici dallemultinazionali delle sementi ad ogni raccolto, perché questi, grazie alla tecnologia “terminator”, non si riproducono più. Il costo di questo sistema di produzione ricade interamente sulle loro spalle, minacciando costantemente la produttività dei raccolti e la loro stessa sopravvivenza. Proteggere la biodiversità significa proteggere l’ambiente e le sue risorse, restituire ai contadini il loro ruolo tradizionale e valorizzare le loro competenze e il loro sapere, mettendoli in grado di coltivare, accanto a ciò che si vende sul mercato, anche ciò che serve alla loro alimentazione. In definitiva, garantisce il diritto al cibo.

La crisi alimentare globale che lascia a pancia vuota più di 800 milioni di persone e porta sulle nostre tavole un cibo sempre più costoso,meno sicuro e ingiusto deriva dall’imposizione di politiche agricole e regole del commercio internazionale sfavorevoli non più solo alle esigenze dei paesi Sud delmondo,ma alla sopravvivenza di intere fasce di popolazione in tutto il pianeta. Queste regole vengono fissate dai governi, dalle istituzioni internazionali e dalle grandi corporations del settore agroalimentare anche sulla base della richiesta del mercato.
Noi, in quanto consumatori, abbiamo un grande potere nel condizionare queste decisioni.
Scegliendo di mettere nel nostro carrello della spesa prodotti biologici, diciamo di no agli ogm e alle produzioni in monocoltura che devastano l’ambiente con il massiccio uso di fertilizzanti. Acquistando prodotti di stagione e provenienti da filiere corte guadagniamo in genuinità e riduciamo i passaggi di intermediazione, premiando il reddito di chi produce e non di chi specula.
Sostenendo i prodotti del commercio equo e solidale dichiariamo apertamente da che parte stiamo: sosteniamo i piccoli produttori del Sud del mondo e un sistema agricolo globale fatto di contadini proprietari delle loro terre, dotati dei mezzi per coltivarle in

armonia con l'ambiente e capaci di ottenerne sia prodotti per l'esportazione (come caffè, zucchero e spezie) che cibo per la propria alimentazione.
Sconfiggere la fame è possibile, ed è una responsabilità che compete ad ognuno di noi.

RIFERIMENTI

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NOTA SULLA DISPENSA

In questa, come nelle altre dispense di Lapsus, troverete materiali di vario genere (dagli estratti di saggi, agli articoli di taglio scientifico a quelli di destinazione divulgativa, alle infografiche, alle schede di approfondimento) con lo scopo di mettere in relazione fonti e linguaggi comunicativi differenti tra loro. L'obiettivo che speriamo di raggiungere con questa scelta è fornire agli studenti un panorama ampio di suggestioni per stimolare l'approfondimento autonomo delle tematiche trattate, nonché lo spirito critico nell'intrecciare diversi punti di vista.

CHAPTER 26

FOOD AND ETHICAL CONSUMPTION

RACHEL A. ANKENY

The usual narrative about food consumption would lead us to believe that over the course of history, most people have made relatively simple choices about what to eat and drink, often without giving much thought to their choices or the values underlying them. Food choices have often been viewed as matters of personal preference rather than something with moral dimensions, unlike actions that have more obvious potential to harm other people such as lying, cheating, or stealing. The relative lack of explicit attention to ethical issues associated with food likely has occurred because people's decisions traditionally arose from a combination of factors such as availability, convenience, cost, habit, and more rarely, actual choice or preference, and hence in some sense their choices were largely out of their control.

A deeper historical exploration reveals that although most of the labels associated with food ethics are neologisms, many of the key issues are not new: some indigenous and traditional societies had codes about who was permitted to kill animals, when, and why (for example, only in times of extreme need and not for routine consumption). In many traditional religions including Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism, there are limitations on what can be eaten or about when certain foods should be eaten and the permissibility, as well as the morality, of particular types of consumption decisions. Some scholars have blamed our neglect of historical recognition of these issues on the tendency in the Christian era to focus on gluttony, categorized in Catholicism as one of the seven cardinal sins, rather than the range of other moral issues related to food.[1]

In the modern developed world, where food is relatively plentiful and society is affluent, there is growing awareness that our choices about what foodstuffs to consume are more complex than a simple response to an empty stomach. The problem

of "what to eat" has changed: we are faced not with an absence of choice about how to obtain even the basics but what often can appear to be an overwhelming range of options. We are variously encouraged to eat local, seasonal, wild, organic, fair trade, or sustainable foodstuffs; to consider whether our foods have been produced in humane or sustainable ways, or have contributed to climate change due to production of what are now known as "food miles"; to boycott companies or industries viewed as behaving in morally irresponsible ways; or more generally, to buy and eat responsibly. So-called "ethicureans," for example, promote eating well while also seeking foods that are sustainable, organic, local, and/or ethical (now known as SOLE foods).[2] Representatives of some religious denominations have argued that ethical decision-making needs to be extended to food choices. In 2005, the Archbishop of Canterbury (the leader of the Church of England) recommended sustainable food consumption and waste reduction, as well as eco-friendly and fair trade product choices, and even organic bread and wine for communion.[3]

Despite these exhortations, trying to make ethical food decisions is a complex matter and can result in contradictory outcomes: fair trade and organic products often travel long distances to market, for instance. It is unclear whether local products have positive effects on the environment, or how the effects of such purchases can be assessed. Even defining "ethical consumerism" is a vexed issue: it is clear that the turn toward ethical consumption cannot be described in terms of a set of shared values, beliefs, or politics on the part of its practitioners. Some argue that ethical consumerism should be generally distinguished from political consumerism (e.g., forms of activism, consumer organizations with particular political aims, and so on),[4] and from responsible or conscientious consumption, which are claimed to have features that are distinctively contemporary and which engage with broader critiques of the excesses of modern life.[5]

Ethical consumerism is probably best understood as a catch-all phrase that covers a range of tendencies, rather than a coherent set of practices.[6] Ethical consumption, in turn, can be viewed as "a political phenomenon in which everyday consumption practices are reconstituted as the sites for citizenly acts that reach beyond the realm of consumption *per se*."[7] Consumption can be a space in which citizen-consumers pursue their conceptualizations of the good life, for instance in making choices that reflect their concerns for fair trade, environmental issues, and so on.[8] Ethical consumerism is a subset of the wider alternative consumption movements that flourished in the second half of the twentieth century, which some claim emerged as a reaction to the Reagan and Thatcher eras.[9]

For purposes of this chapter, "ethical food consumerism" is taken to describe a set of diverse and often conflicting food choices that are voluntary and outwardly directed as a result of the actor's beliefs about his or her values, responsibilities, and so on. A decision not to eat meat products or foodstuffs containing genetically modified organisms solely for health reasons would not be considered as part of this category, nor would the purchase of fair trade cocoa because it tastes better than alternatives but without regard to the fact that it is produced under fair conditions for workers.

Studying ethical food consumption requires not only examining what people buy and consume but why they make particular types of food choices, as developing

an account of people's motivations is essential to understanding this category of consumption. Consequently, scholarship on ethical food consumerism utilizes diverse methods, including those of the social sciences, environmental studies, marketing and business, and philosophy. Discussions about these issues often occur outside of the context of food studies narrowly construed (so for instance in explorations of consumerism, corporate governance, or globalization). It relies on a range of types of source materials, many of which are ephemeral and popular in nature such as menus and advertising, as well as governmental policies, dietary surveys, and more traditional scholarly source materials, which often are limited in terms of content relating to people's motivations. Hence any scholar attempting to trace the history of ethical food consumption faces considerable methodological challenges.

This chapter aims to outline the major topics associated with contemporary food ethics arising from these various disciplinary perspectives, seeks to articulate underlying themes and continuities within recent popular and scholarly discussions of ethical food consumerism, as well as analyzing the very notion of "ethical food consumption." It proposes that the main difference between contemporary and historic discussions of food ethics can be found in the strengthening connection between identity and ethical food choices, which in turn has reshaped our understandings of ethical food choices.

Vegetarianism and Veganism

As a food choice, there perhaps is no category with more varied motivations underlying it than vegetarianism. Empirical studies of contemporary forms of vegetarianism have found that animal welfare concerns are commonly reported by its adherents, along with personal concerns for health.[10] Ethical vegetarians typically avoid consumption of meat in order to minimize harm to animals, and often make sudden changes in their food choices to support their beliefs in animal welfare in order to bring their actions in alignment with their moral beliefs.[11] In contrast, health vegetarians typically avoid meat in order to lose weight, or to pursue various benefits to their personal well-being that they associate with vegetarianism. Health vegetarians often make more gradual conversions to vegetarianism than ethical vegetarians.[12]

The term "vegetarian" appears to date to the late 1830s (and hence the notion of identifying oneself explicitly through this dietary choice is a recent one), but the idea of a vegetarian diet was present in ancient times. Those who partook of such a diet were sometimes formerly called Pythagoreans, after the early Greek philosopher who argued against consumption of animal flesh.[13] Vegetarianism also has a long history within certain religious traditions such as Hinduism and Buddhism.[14] In Hinduism, for instance, avoiding all meat, but beef in particular, is related both to religious beliefs such as the transmigration of the soul but also arguably ethical ideas about the sacred nature of the cow. Buddhism generally bans intentional killing, including of animals for consumption, and ties this prohibition to the moral

precept of compassion and non-harm of others. However, its core texts do not explicitly address the consumption of flesh from animals that are already dead, so many modern-day Buddhists are not strict vegetarians.

A growing subcategory of ethical vegetarians is composed of those who reduce or avoid meat consumption due to concerns about the potential negative environmental impacts of meat consumption and production.[15] Yet another subcategory of ethical vegetarians (which perhaps could be termed feminist ethical vegetarians) includes people concerned not only with animal welfare but with the systems of patriarchy promoted by the production of meat for food and its consumption.[16] A higher percentage of vegetarians are women, although this is usually attributed to a mix of factors, including greater concern on average for health and diet rather than a set of shared moral beliefs. However, feminist critics such as Kathryn Paxson George have noted that calls for universal ethical vegetarianism rely on assumption of the male as the norm for human beings, and hence results in ageism, sexism, and classism.[17]

Veganism in its current forms is a more recent movement, dating formally only to the mid-1900s, though adhering to a "bloodless diet" has a much longer history.[18] It took its name from the first and last letters of "vegetarian": as its originator Donald Watson indicated, "veganism starts with vegetarianism and carries it through to its logical conclusion."[19] Advocates of veganism view it as a natural extension of moral vegetarianism, inasmuch as their refusal to consume all animal products (including eggs and dairy products such as cheese, butter, and milk) is taken as a stand against all forms of animal exploitation. Although veganism was initially thought to be extreme even by many within the vegetarian movement, nowadays veganism is often viewed as an ideal to which many vegetarians aspire.[20]

There are a variety of lines of criticism about vegetarianism and veganism in particular, ranging from concerns about whether it is a healthy choice to questions about whether it is evolutionarily appropriate to avoid all animal products. There is a long intellectual history from Aristotle onward supporting the natural hierarchy of men over animals (and women), and the inferior nature of these other beings.[21] More recently some scholars such as Roger Scruton have argued that advocating vegetarianism has become a new form of extremist religion among some adherents, and so instead we should attempt to reduce our meat consumption and to consume conscientiously.[22] Hence as Leon Kass and others claim, we must become more aware of the spiritual and moral values associated with food, rather than just seeing food as fuel, and hence it is most effective and meaningful to focus on the quality of our eating habits (including how they can foster relationships and communities) rather than on the elimination of one type of foodstuff.[23]

Animal Welfare

Increasing numbers of people avoid certain types of products, or seek out others, because of their desire not to contribute to cruelty or abuse of animals.[24] The classic

example of this type of ethical consumption decision is the rejection of eating veal due to the conditions under which these cows are raised, described as inhumane because of early separation of calves from their mothers, deliberate inhibition of growth through an unnatural diet and other means, and severe limits on the space in which the calves are raised in order to limit muscle development and produce a more tender product. These conditions often result in animals which are much more susceptible to high levels of stress and disease.[25] Graphic documentation about these rearing conditions and their effects became widely available in the United States, the United Kingdom, and elsewhere in Europe in the 1980s, and veal sales have declined significantly in many Western countries since that time.[26] The American Veal Association has plans to phase out the use of crates for raising veal by 2017, and demand for free-raised veal is rapidly increasing.

A more recent controversy surrounds foie gras, a food product made from the liver of a duck or goose that has been specially fattened, typically through force feeding of corn in a process known as gavage. A number of countries (including Israel, Italy, and the United Kingdom) and the state of California directly or indirectly ban the force feeding of animals for non-medical purposes. The production of foie gras is prohibited by treaty by the Council of Europe's European Convention for the Protection of Animals kept for Farming Purposes "except where it is current practice."[27]

Animal welfare concerns also often underlie a number of positive consumption decisions, and have fostered the recent proliferation of a range of new product categories, certification schemes, and labels, such as free-range, cage-free, or humane eggs, poultry, and meat products. Critics note that the legal regulations defining these categories are different or non-existent depending on the jurisdiction, and the labels used are oftentimes highly misleading.[28] A variety of labels have been developed to attempt to accurately describe the conditions under which chickens live, such as "barn-roaming" (chickens which do not range freely but live in barns rather than restrictive cages), as well as improved methods for measuring welfare.[29] These categories often are misinterpreted by consumers, who might interpret them as indicating that the animals only feed on grass and other natural products, which is not necessarily the case even if they are "free-range." Other major ethical consumption categories include dolphin-safe tuna and other types of fish, and grass-fed beef, which bring with them similar definitional problems in some locales, along with conflicting interpretations by consumers.

Local Consumption

Reconnecting consumers to the origins of their foodstuffs through personal contact at farmers' markets, labeling which provides detailed information about production methods and locales, and standards for recording and communicating provenance through official or more informal labels has been claimed to be a leitmotiv

of ethical consumption.[30] A range of settings that promote local consumption have grown in popularity in recent years, including farmers' markets, farm door sales, community-supported agriculture, and community gardens, accompanied by increasing use of the label "locavore."[31] Often local consumption is promoted in conjunction with seasonal foods and a return to self-sufficiency through kitchen gardens and similar small-scale modes of production for personal use, as in the novelist Barbara Kingsolver's recent tome (coauthored with her daughter and husband) about their attempts to grow most of their food and eat seasonally.[32]

The general concept of buying local has an extremely long history: it is arguable that most food that was purchased or even bartered in traditional societies was locally-produced, except exotic or luxury goods such as spices. Explicit promotion of local products repeatedly has occurred in a number of places as an expression of nationalism.[33] For instance, in India, the pre-Gandhi Swadeshi ("self-sufficiency") movement in the early 1900s urged people to buy Indian products and boycott British ones, including foodstuffs, in order to combat British imperialism.[34] Contemporary promotion of local eating is not typically based in nationalism, but tends to be focused on a smaller conception of the "local," including focus on a defined radius as seen in promotion of the "100-mile diet."[35]

The Slow Food movement, which began in Italy in 1986 through its predecessor organization Arcigola's resistance to the opening of a McDonald's outlet in Rome, has a particular emphasis on the local.[36] This movement has since expanded to more than 130 countries. Adherents seek to preserve traditional and regional cuisine and food-related practices, as well as to encourage sustainable agriculture characteristic of local ecosystems through seed banks and the "Ark of Taste," an international catalogue of heritage foods and local food traditions which have been identified as in danger of extinction. As part of the broader Slow movement, Slow Food retains an overarching agenda in opposition to globalization.[37] Critics rightly note that the formal Slow Food movement is rather amorphous and non-unified, and can be viewed as promoting an elitist view of the "right way" to eat, particularly given its focus on cultural and other forms of "authenticity," specialized culinary traditions, and gastronomic pleasure.[38]

Several overlapping ethical rationales underlie most local eating philosophies: first, buying local keeps your money in your local community, and hence strengthens those communities economically and otherwise. Buying local, for instance at farm doors or farmers' markets, can allow the building of relationships based on understanding and trust, which further contribute to the strength of the community. Consumption of local foods supports small, family farms, many of which have become endangered by the growth of multinational corporations, rising costs of agriculture, and so on. A final ethical rationale for buying local is that it can help protect the environment by reducing food miles, packaging, and waste.

The validity of these rationales needs to be carefully assessed within the particular context of particular consumption decisions, and with regard to a range of other factors. For instance buying local produce outside of the usual growing season can contribute to more carbon dioxide emissions (as hothouse production

can be very inefficient) than buying imported goods grown in warmer climates.[39] Scholars such as Gwendolyn Blue note that the turn toward local eating is embedded in neoliberal forms of governance and helps to reinforce these problematic institutions.[40] In addition, focusing narrowly on the local can result, as Claire C. Hinrichs puts it, in "a conflation of spatial relations for social ones,"[41] and create romanticized and elitist illusions of human connectedness rather than real, sustainable communities. Finally, being a "locavore" has become a sort of identity claim for those seeking to be ethical food consumers.

Organic Foods

Organic foods are generally defined as those grown without the use of "artificial" or non-organic components such as pesticides and fertilizers, and processed without using irradiation, solvents, or food additives. Regulations about precisely what can be labeled as "organic" differ from place to place, including the percentage of the overall product which must be organically-produced for it to be labeled as such. Some regulations specifically make reference to environmental conditions, such as the 1990 U.S. Organic Foods Production Act and related regulations which explicitly discuss the integration of cultural, biological, and mechanical practices to foster cycling of resources, promote ecological balance, and conserve biodiversity. In most countries, organic produce may not be genetically modified, and in many locations antibiotics and growth hormone cannot be used for livestock to be considered organic. Costs for organic products are usually considerably higher than their conventional counterparts.

As with vegetarianism, those who pursue organic diets typically have differing motivations, some of which are connected to health or others to the perception of organic foods as safer, fresher, or of higher quality, while still others buy organics primarily for what they view as environmental reasons. The obvious rationale for the latter group is that less fertilizer and pesticide use is likely to result in less environmental damage and also less health risks for farm workers. Organic growers need to sustain diverse ecosystems in order to maintain their crops, and thus use natural means for pest control (such as animals or insects), which in turn also has positive environmental effects. Finally, organic farms use less energy and produce less waste (for instance, packaging associated with synthetic ingredients used in conventional farming). In some cases supporting organic production also allows support for local agriculture as, until recently, organic products were largely available only at farm doors or through farmers' markets.

As with most of the previous categories of ethical foods, the "organic" label also has considerable meaning for the shaping of oneself as a particular sort of consumer. However, critics of organics point out that the current systems of labeling and certification are flawed, and that we now have an overreliance on regulation

and inspection, especially given the rapid increase in demand for organic foods, which has resulted in high volume sales through mass outlets and the corporatization of the organic sector. This shift of organics from small scale to big business means that some of the values previously associated with support for organics, such as the fostering of smaller farmers, are no longer valid associations. Some commentators have noted that certain organic products, such as packaged salad mix or mesclun, ironically have now become the ultimate industrialized food product, or "yuppie chow."[42]

Food Products Free of Genetically Modified Organisms

Genetically modified organisms (GMOs) have had their genes altered by laboratory techniques that remove a gene or change its function, or insert a gene from another organism, in order to create desirable attributes. There are a number of GMO plants available on the commercial market, notably soy, canola, and corn. The United States is by far the largest producer of GM food. Genetically modified animals for commercial use and consumption have been slower to be developed for scientific, technical, and commercial reasons.

Foodstuffs that are genetically modified have become of increasing concern to consumers in certain places; in Europe, for instance, there is considerable opposition to GMOs not only because of worries about their potential effects on human health, but also for ethical reasons.[43] Some are aligned with philosophical or religious objections that genetic modification is like "playing God" and should not be supported because it represents an extreme form of human interference with nature.[44] These critics are particularly concerned about genes transferred from one species into another in a manner which goes far beyond what might ever occur naturally. However, even some opponents of GMOs note that this argument is rather limited and Luddite, as it would seem to rule out human interventions in nature more generally and the domestication of plants and animals in particular. The second main ethical argument against genetic modification claims that GM crops and other released GMOs pose unacceptable and unknowable risks of irreversible environmental damage. The most serious concern is that genetically modified plants will cross with non-genetically modified relatives, and could result in an environmental disaster that could not be controlled if the plants were to become invasive.[45]

Some advocates claim that GMOs could result in more sustainable food crops, such as drought-tolerant or saline-tolerant wheat, which could thrive in extreme environments such as Australia. Others have argued that used judiciously and with appropriate cautions, GMOs could represent an important solution to the global

food problem. Genetic modification could be used to produce staples that are more nourishing and have higher levels of particular vitamins, which could assist with widespread nutritional deficiencies. "Golden rice" is a prime example of such a GMO; it is engineered to contain beta-carotene, which is a precursor to vitamin A, a deficiency of which is a major cause of blindness in young children in the developing world.[46] Development of strains that are naturally resistant to pests or weeds, for instance, could reduce the use of synthetic pesticides and herbicides, and hence be more ecologically sound than conventional cropping and better for human health of workers and those living in agricultural settings. However, these arguments have somewhat limited impact; given that many of the major manufacturers of GMOs have been multinational corporations driven by profit motives, most GM crops have not been created with the developing world as their target market. Increased research on GMOs may have even led to declines in food aid, as a technological fix is viewed as being within reach.[47]

In addition to broader issues about food policy and GMOs, debates over labeling remain in a number of places, notably the United States.[48] Although the European Union, Australia, New Zealand, and a number of Asian countries have mandatory labeling requirements for knowingly including genetically modified ingredients, the United States does not. The ubiquitous presence of corn, soy, and canola in foodstuffs produced in the United States means that a majority of American processed foods contain GMOs, unless consumers buy organically produced products.

Food Miles and Green Products

The term "food miles" originated in the 1990s, and generally is used to refer to the distance that food is transported from the time of its production until it reaches the consumer. Many people argue that there has been a marked increase in the amount of food miles traveled in recent years due to rapidly increasing global trade, changes in food supply chain patterns (such as consolidation of packaging and supply depots especially in larger supermarket chains), and the increase of processed and packaged foods which often are not produced locally. Food miles are often used as a measure of environmental impact, particularly carbon footprint and contribution to global warming. Major supermarket chains such as Tesco in the United Kingdom have attempted to use stickers on products to indicate food miles traveled or carbon footprint equivalencies, but these schemes have had difficulties due to lack of standardized measurement systems and difficulties in breaking down the components of processed foods.[49]

Criticisms of the concept of food miles are numerous: first, there are many other stages in the food supply chain that also contribute to greenhouse gas emissions, notably the energy used during production of industrial agriculture, including

pesticides, fertilizers, and high-carbon processing equipment. For instance, food produced in more temperate or energy-efficient settings and then transported may use less energy on average than food produced in hothouses or livestock raised on feed rather than at pasture.[50] Others argue that the best way to reduce carbon footprint is to eat a vegetarian diet. In short, food miles might be one part of a larger puzzle about appropriate ethical actions for consumers seeking to improve the environment and its sustainability.

Food miles are a subcategory of "green" products more generally, which are associated with buying decisions intended to have a positive impact (or at least to reduce negative impacts) on the environment. Many skeptics note that the "green" category is not well-defined legally and few regulations exist for labeling (as compared for example to organic labeling); hence there is an increasing amount of "greenwashing" products, claims made with little evidence of their environmental impact.[51] As the number of people who identify themselves as "green consumers" continues to grow, some scholars have argued that a shift is needed to viewing green consumers as "green citizens," hence reinforcing a more holistic and broader approach to these issues.[52]

Boycotts and Cause-Related Marketing

Boycotts have been a common way of using consumption decisions to express moral views, or perhaps more skeptically, to use purchasing power to attempt to sway companies or other institutions away from unethical practices. Even some forms of "economic" boycotts might be understood as ethical, because although their main focus is rising prices, they typically target staple foods such as meat, sugar, and milk, and have often been promoted by volunteers, typically housewives, on behalf of others.[53]

An early food boycott campaign occurred in Britain in the late 1700s and early 1800s following the failure to pass the Abolition of the Slave Trade Bill in 1791. Hundreds of thousands of people refused to buy sugar produced by slaves on Caribbean plantations. Some advocated purchasing sugar from East India instead; sugar bowls became available with mottos such as "East India sugar not made by slaves."[54] These campaigns had qualities that often have been seen in subsequent food boycott efforts. First, there was a rhetorical connection made between consumption and moral behavior, focusing on routine consumption decisions as evidence of values and beliefs. Second, women often took a leadership role, as abstention from purchasing and consumption was one way they could assert their moral beliefs, particularly when they were not able to vote.

Among the most visible boycotts of the second half of the twentieth century were two food-related campaigns: the boycotts of grapes in the United States (1960s–1980s) and the targeting of Nestle (1974–1984). The boycotting of grapes

began in the mid-1960s when Filipino-American farm workers initiated a strike to protest low wages. Union activist César Chávez of the National Farm Workers' Association (later the United Farm Workers) broadened the strike and encouraged all Americans to boycott table grapes to show support for the workers. The strike lasted five years and brought national attention to working conditions for migrant laborers. In the 1980s, Chávez led a boycott to protest the use of toxic pesticides on grapes, which some believe led to negotiation of new and more favorable contracts for workers, though others question whether the boycott had any lasting impact. Probably the first case of global brand-based activism arose in response to the marketing of infant formula in Africa and Asia despite medical research associating formula use with higher infant morality as compared to breast milk. Although other companies sold formula in these markets, Nestle was a ripe target given its visibility and association with "family values."[55]

Other modern boycotts have focused on rejecting products produced in particular places as a form of political protest, such as the boycotts on South African apples during the Apartheid era or Chilean grapes under the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. More recently there has been global attention to palm oil and its connection to environmental damage generated by deforestation, particularly the destruction of habitat for endangered orangutans. Foods made with palm oil, including Cadbury and Nestle chocolate and even Girl Scout cookies, have become targets. Critics of this campaign, including those within the palm oil industry, have noted that palm oil and can be grown using sustainable and high-yield methods and may serve as an important food supplement due to its high Vitamin A content.[56]

The converse of boycotts might be products associated with cause-related marketing, which has grown considerably in popularity since the 1970s. Such campaigns encourage purchase of particular products from which a percentage of the profits goes to a charity. The term "cause-related marketing" generally refers to cooperative efforts of a business with a non-profit organization to promote social or charitable purposes. Some recent cause-related marketing campaigns include pink ribbon campaigns on bottled water and yoghurt in support of breast cancer research, and contributions from water cooler providers to supply clean drinking water to Africa.[57] Another example is the KereKere cafe at the University of Melbourne, Australia, which not only serves a wide range of coffees (organic, Fair Trade, Rainforest-Alliance branded, and sustainable) but also allows each customer to decide how the profits should be distributed. The cafe claims to be fostering "a culture that promotes community wellbeing."[58]

Businesses benefit from increased sales and positive public relations, while non-profit organizations not only raise money but also increase the awareness of their causes. For the consumer, purchasing cause-related products is a fairly simple and inexpensive way to support an ethical cause, usually through a product they were planning to purchase anyway. Criticisms of such schemes note that the percentage of profits redirected to the charities is typically miniscule, and such partnerships allows for-profit companies to look good without making significant social contributions.

Fair Trade

Consumers are becoming increasingly conscious about the human consequences of the ways products they purchase are produced, and the possible injustices promoted by their consumption choices. Exposés including the book *Bitter Chocolate: The Dark Side of the World's Most Seductive Sweet* (2006) and the film *Black Gold* (2006) about the international coffee trade and Ethiopian growers have brought unjust working conditions to popular attention.[59] The "fair trade" movement takes a market-based approach (through providing economic incentives) aiming to help producers in developing countries to achieve better working conditions, sustainable production, and higher profits. Food products including cocoa, chocolate, sugar, coffee, tea, wine, various fruits, and herbs and spices have received formal certification from various labeling schemes implemented since the 1980s.[60]

The history of the fair trade concept goes back at least as far as the mid-1900s, when religious groups and non-governmental organizations promoted handicrafts and other goods from developing countries. The movement became more radical and politicized in the 1960s, when it aimed to empower people in the developing world in a sustainable manner rather than simply through aid. From a small start, this movement has grown rapidly through the adoption of fair trade standards and products by mainstream outlets and large corporations.[61] Larger companies that promote fair trade products include the U.K. supermarket chain the Co-Op (which uses fair trade coffee and chocolate for their home brands) and Cadbury in Australia and New Zealand (whose milk chocolate products have recently become Fairtrade certified).

The ethical imperatives underlying fair trade are fairly clear: it claims that international trade treats producers in developing countries unfairly. Hence buying fair trade products fosters more just conditions for workers and improves everyday life in impoverished areas. Fair trade also is seen as an attempt to address market failures by assuring stable commodity prices, business support, market access, and better trading conditions.

Fair trade has been subject to a range of criticisms: those on the political right see fair trade as marketing ploy that can impede economic growth and glut markets in developing countries, while some on the left see fair trade as overly dependent on a market model and hence not sufficiently revolutionary to achieve its underlying philosophical and economic objectives. Other criticisms parallel those leveled at local food initiatives, pointing to the paradoxes inherent in these attempts to re-connect producers and consumers through the creation of a transnational moral economy.[62]

Waste, Overconsumption, and Freeganism

Though primarily about health and the negative effects of fast food, the now-classic film *Super Size Me* (2004) also helped to raise awareness of globalization and waste.

Most industrial societies waste large amounts of food due to overpurchasing and neglect.[63] Together with the failure to compost or recycle, such habits make a significant contribution to our carbon footprint. However, reducing waste has proven to be extremely difficult to address because of ingrained habits of purchasing and the psychology of consumption. The recognition of increasing waste and its impacts has led to a variety of ethical strategies to attempt to mitigate these effects.

"Downshifting" or "simple living" are general terms used to refer to lifestyles pursued by individuals who wish to have simpler lives and escape from the pernicious influences of modernity and materialism.[64] Such behaviors may not be ethically based inasmuch as they often are primarily motivated by personal desire and not by outwardly focused values. In some cases, however, such lifestyle decisions consciously aim to improve society and the environment. At an extreme, freeganism is a form of simple living derived from "free" and "vegan." Freegans extend the vegan commitment to avoid harming animals or the environment, as well by avoiding purchasing and relying instead on foraging, bartering, and similar nonconsumer strategies. "Punk cuisine," an extreme form of freeganism, adds stolen and rotten foods to scavenged products as a means of challenging conventional hierarchies and protesting capitalist environmental destruction.[65]

In all of these types of food philosophies, reduction of waste and pollution is a key goal, particularly given the injustices present between the developed and developing world, as well as the "haves" and "have nots" of the Global North. Freegans are most well-recognized for their strategies for obtaining food through "urban foraging," also known as "dumpster diving" or "skip dipping," rummaging through trash bins for useful goods that are safe and clean. They also promote foraging of wild goods and community gardens to re-connect with the environment and to foster a deeper sense of community.[66] Although the word "freeganism" is new, scavenging has long been a part of urban life. What perhaps is new is the alignment with voluntary political action, environmentalism, and the rejection of materialism, as well as the assertion of identity claims in relation to this type of activity.[67]

Beyond Ethical Food Consumers

Consumerism continues to flourish in the late twentieth century, and skeptics view "ethical consumerism" as simply one form of consumerism without any particularly deep grounding in moral values. According to them, ethical consumers are archetypal consumers making choices based on formal branding such as Fairtrade or organic, or more informal brands such as green, and who are (mistakenly) attempting to construct an interconnected social world through these brands, in part through staking identity claims in relation to these brands. At one extreme, accumulation of property and its consumption (even under the guise of "ethical" consumption) should be viewed as a deeply flawed means of seeking happiness,

and we should pursue alternative, less economically driven models of the good life.[68] Ethical consumption has bourgeois connotations, with food choices becoming the newest high-fashion handbag or trendy ingredient, a mere signifier of social status and identity, reinforcing a "brand culture" with all of the associated social problems.[69]

Other critics note that ethical consumption is being promoted as part of a neoliberal agenda in order to transfer responsibilities to individuals as consumers and away from collective action and acknowledgment of governmental responsibility for meeting social needs, especially for fundamentals such as food and water.[70] Doing so may inadvertently promote "food anxieties," particularly because of the lack of clear and regulated labeling, which makes it difficult for consumers to act in an ethical manner. Focusing on individuals as the locus for action allows us to ignore structural inequalities and consumption practices in the modern food system.[71] Allowing consumerism to dominate the discussion may direct attention away from social justice and class inequalities, particularly among workers.[72]

Although historically "marginal" groups such as women and workers were involved in boycotts and movements that we now would recognize as forms of ethical food consumerism, many means of ethical consumption are not open to everyone.[73] As a form of political engagement, it primarily empowers those with the financial or social capital to buy supposedly "ethical" products (freeganism is perhaps an exception, though some would argue that the time to pursue this lifestyle on a voluntary basis is a luxury of the relatively affluent). This situation is arguably exacerbated by the high cost of organic or fair trade products compared to conventional goods. In turn the practices associated with pursuit of these ethical food choices (such as patronizing farmers' markets or stores specializing in green or organic goods) can be seen as contributing to class and geographic divisions, gentrification, and exclusion of minorities and the poor, rather than promoting social unification.[74]

Many people attempting to make ethical food choices rely on labeling, despite the well-recognized limitations of such systems. More generally, focusing on knowledge (e.g., about what is contained in a product or how it was produced) reinforces the dominant consumer culture.[75] In turn the focus on products as equivalent to their contents and their labels reinforces the equation of identity with particular types of consumption decisions (for instance "green" or "local"), rather than promoting the underlying values associated with these goods (such as environmental sustainability or reduction of carbon emissions).

A final line of critique points out that many forms of ethical consumption are produced by multinational corporations for profit, not "ethical" reasons, despite the common rhetoric of "corporate social responsibility." Hence participation in such profit-based endeavors undermines the radical transformations proponents of ethical consumerism envision.[76] Even John Mackey, the CEO of Whole Foods Market, a major U.S. supermarket chain that prides itself on stocking ethical food products, noted that its adoption of a policy in the mid-2000s not to stock eggs from caged hens was a result of "customer demand" rather than ethical motivations.[77]

Co-opting "alternative" discourses about food ethics has become common among mainstream retailers.[78]

In sum, even if it is clear that ethical food consumption can be quite problematic, and perhaps clouds the real goals associated with food ethics (such as assuring food security, including equal access to nourishing, culturally appropriate, sustainable, secure, and safe food), attention to ethical food consumption does allow us to examine the various issues associated with our dominant production and consumption methods.[79] It can allow us to question our choices and to cultivate more popular awareness of alternatives. Perhaps on a deeper level, increasing attention to food ethics forces us to examine our moral relationships with others.[80] It also can allow us to better understand (and potentially transform) our own identities and roles in what is a complex modern world. Being a critical food consumer is an important step in engaging as members of the global community and seeking to improve conditions for all, particularly with regard to basics such as food and water.

NOTES

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GRASSROOTS VOICES

Food sovereignty

Raj Patel, Guest Editor

What does food sovereignty look like?

Raj Patel

Hannah Arendt observed that the first right, above all others, is the right to have rights. In many ways, Via Campesina's call for food sovereignty is precisely about invoking a right to have rights over food. But it's unclear quite how to cash out these ideas. This Grassroots Voices section examines some of the difficulties involved in parlaying the right to have rights about food systems into practical solutions.

The etymology of *food sovereignty*

There is, among those who use the term, a strong sense that while 'food sovereignty' might be hard to define, it is the sort of thing one knows when one sees. This is a little unsatisfactory, and this section marks an attempt to put a little more flesh on the concept's bones, beyond the widely agreed notion that food sovereignty isn't what we have at the moment. Before introducing the papers that make up the rest of this section, it is worth looking at the etymology of the term 'food sovereignty'.

It is, admittedly, the first instinct of an uninspired scholar to head toward definitions. I have, far more frequently than I'd care to remember, plundered the Oxford English Dictionary for an authoritative statement of terms against which I then tilted. The problem with food sovereignty is, however, a reverse one. Food sovereignty is, if anything, over defined. There are so many versions of the concept, it is hard to know exactly what it means. The proliferation of overlapping definitions is, however, a symptom of food sovereignty itself, woven into the fabric of food sovereignty by necessity. Since food sovereignty is a call for peoples' rights to shape and craft food policy, it can hardly be surprising that this right is not used to explore and expand the covering political philosophy. The result of this exploration has sometimes muddled and masked some difficult contradictions within the notion of food sovereignty, and these are contradictions worth exploring.

Before going into those definitions and contradictions, though, it is worth contrasting food sovereignty with the concept against which it has traditionally been ranged – food security. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United

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Nations (FAO) has done a fine job of tracking the evolution of 'food security' (see FAO 2003), but it is useful to be reminded that the first official definition in 1974 of 'food security' was

> the availability at all times of adequate world food supplies of basic foodstuffs to sustain a steady expansion of food consumption and to offset fluctuations in production and prices. (United Nations 1975 cited in FAO 2003)

The utility of the term in 1974 derived from its political economic context, in the midst of the Sahelian famine, at the zenith of demands for a New International Economic Order, and the peak of Third Worldist power, which had already succeeded in establishing the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) as a bastion of commodity price stabilisation (Rajagopal 2000). In such a context, when states were the sole authors of the definition, and when there was a technocratic faith in the ability of states to redistribute resources if the resources could only be made available, it made sense to talk about sufficient world supplies, and for the primary concern of the term's authors to lie in price stabilisation. Compare the language and priorities reflected in the early 1970s definition to this more recent one:

> Food security [is] a situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. (FAO 2001 cited in FAO 2003)

The source for this definition was *The State of Food Insecurity 2001*, and herein lies some of the tale in the widening gyre of 'food security'. The definition in 2001 was altogether more sweeping. While it marked the success of activists and the NGO and policymaking community to both enlarge the community of authors of such statements to include non-state actors and to shift the discussion away from production issues toward broader social concerns, it was also an intervention in a very different world and series of debates. No longer was there a Non-Aligned Movement. Nor was there, at least in the world of state-level diplomacy, the possibility of an alternative to US-style neoliberal capitalism. It was an intervention at a time when neoliberal triumphalism could be seen in the break away from a commitment to the full meeting of human rights, to the watered down Millennium Development Goals, which provided, under the mantle of 'realistically achievable goals', a much more elastic time frame for the achievement of goals that were intended by the authors of such goals to be delivered with all due haste. The early 2000s was also a time when the institutions originally created to fight hunger, such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, were looking increasingly irrelevant and cosmetic in the decision making around hunger policy. The expansion of the definition of food security in 2001, in other words, was both a cause and consequence of its increasing irrelevance as a guiding concept in the shaping of international food production and consumption priorities.

While harsh, this assessment is not unreasonable. The terms on which food is, or is not, made available by the international community has been taken away from institutions that might be oriented by concerns of 'food security', and given to the market, which is guided by an altogether different calculus. It is, then, possible to tell a coherent story of the evolution of 'food security' by using the term as a mirror of international political economy. But that story is not one in which capital is dominant – 'food security' moved from being simply about producing and distributing food, to a whole nexus of concerns around nutrition, social control,

and public health. In no small part, that broadening was a direct result of the leadership taken by Via Campesina to introduce at the World Food Summit in 1996 the idea of 'food sovereignty', a term that was very specifically intended as a foil to the prevailing notions of food security. The understanding of food security in 1996, as reflected in the declaration of the UN World Food Summit, was this:

> Food security, at the individual, household, national, regional and global levels [is achieved] when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. (FAO 1996 cited in FAO 2003)

Critically, the definition of food security avoided discussing the social control of the food system. As far as the terms of food security go, it is entirely possible for people to be food secure in prison or under a dictatorship. From a state perspective, the absence of specification about how food security should come about was diplomatic good sense – to introduce language that committed member states to particular internal political arrangements would have made the task of agreeing on a definition considerably more difficult. But having been at the whip end of structural adjustment and other policies that had had the effect of 'depeasantising' rural areas under the banner of increasing food security by increasing efficiency (Araghi 1995), Via Campesina's position was that a discussion of internal political arrangements was a necessary part of the substance of food security. Indeed, food sovereignty was declared a logical precondition for the existence of food security:

> Long-term food security depends on those who produce food and care for the natural environment. As the stewards of food producing resources we hold the following principles as the necessary foundation for achieving food security.... Food is a basic human right. This right can only be realized in a system where food sovereignty is guaranteed. *Food sovereignty is the right of each nation to maintain and develop its own capacity to produce its basic foods respecting cultural and productive diversity*. We have the right to produce our own food in our own territory. Food sovereignty is a precondition to genuine food security. (Via Campesina 1996; emphasis added)

To raise questions about the context of food security, and therefore to pose questions about the relations of power that characterise decisions about how food security should be attained, was shrewd. The first exposition of food sovereignty recognised this *ab initio*, that the power politics of the food system needed very explicitly to feature in the discussion. In the context of an international meeting, at a time of unquestioned US hegemony, and given states' reluctance to discuss the means through which food security was to be achieved, it made sense to deploy language to which states had already committed themselves. Thus, the language of food sovereignty inserts itself into international discourse by making claims on rights and democracy, the cornerstones of liberal governance.

Big tents and rights-talk

The outlines of food sovereignty have been well rehearsed elsewhere (McMichael 2008, Rosset 2003, Windfuhr and Jonsén 2005). The common denominator in these accounts is the notion that the politics of food security is something that requires direct democratic participation, an end to the dumping of food and the wider use of food as a weapon of policy, comprehensive agrarian reform, and a respect for life, seed, and land. But as the exponents of food sovereignty, myself included, have begun to explore what this might mean, things have started to look increasingly odd.

The term has changed over time, just like 'food security', but while it is possible to write an account of the evolution of 'food security' with reference to changing international politics, it is much harder to make coherent the changes with 'food sovereignty'. From the core of the 1996 definition, italicised above, consider this one, written six years later:

> Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to define their own food and agriculture; to protect and regulate domestic agricultural production and trade in order to achieve sustainable development objectives; to determine the extent to which they want to be self reliant; to restrict the dumping of products in their markets; and to provide local fisheries-based communities the priority in managing the use of and the rights to aquatic resources. Food sovereignty does not negate trade, but rather, it promotes the formulation of trade policies and practices that serve the rights of peoples to safe, healthy and ecologically sustainable production. (Peoples Food Sovereignty Network 2002)

It is a cautious definition, talking about the right to define food policy, sensitive to the question of whether trade might belong in a world with food sovereignty. Perhaps most clearly, it is a definition written in committee. The diversity of opinions, positions, issues, and politics bursts through in the text – from the broad need for sustainable development objectives to the specific needs of fishing villages to manage aquatic resources. This is an important strength. Food sovereignty is a big tent, and the definition reflects that very well indeed.

The idea of a 'big tent' politics is that disparate groups can recognise themselves in the enunciation of a particular programme. But at the core of this programme needs to lay an internally consistent set of ideas.[1] It is a core that has never fully been made explicit, which might explain why in more recent definitions of food sovereignty, increasing levels of inconsistency can be found. Consider this statement, from Via Campesina's Nyéléni Declaration, reprinted in full later in this section:

> Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations. It defends the interests and inclusion of the next generation. It offers a strategy to resist and dismantle the current corporate trade and food regime, and directions for food, farming, pastoral and fisheries systems determined by local producers. Food sovereignty prioritises local and national economies and markets and empowers peasant and family farmer-driven agriculture, artisanal fishing, pastoralist-led grazing, and food production, distribution and consumption based on environmental, social and economic sustainability. Food sovereignty promotes transparent trade that guarantees just income to all peoples and the rights of consumers to control their food and nutrition. It ensures that the rights to use and manage our lands, territories, waters, seeds, livestock and biodiversity are in the hands of those of us who produce food. Food sovereignty implies new social relations free of oppression and inequality between men and women, peoples, racial groups, social classes and generations. (Via Campesina 2007)

The contradictions in this are a little more fatal.[2] The phrase 'those who produce, distribute and consume food' refers, unfortunately, to everyone, including the

[1]See Michaels (2008), for instance, on the politics of 'big tent' diversity being perfectly compatible with the neoliberal project.
[2]In using this term, I refer to Mao's typology of contradiction (Mao 1967).

transnational corporations rejected in the second half of the sentence. There is also a glossing-over of one of the key distinctions in agrarian capitalism – that between farm owner and farmworker. To harmonise these two groups' interests is a far less tractable effort than the authors of the declaration might hope. Finally, but perhaps most contradictory, is the emphasis of 'new social relations' in the same paragraph as family farming, when the family is one of the oldest factories for patriarchy.

There are, of course, ways to smooth out some of these wrinkles – one might interpret 'those who produce, distribute and consume food' as natural rather than legal people. Corporations are not flesh and blood, and while they might be given equal rights as humans, there are growing calls for the privilege to be revoked (Bakan 2004). Even if one accepts this definitional footwork, we remain with the problem that even between human producers and consumers in the food system, power and control over the means of production is systematically unevenly distributed.

One way to balance these disparities is through the explicit introduction of rights-based language. To talk of a *right* to shape food policy is to contrast it with a *privilege*. The modern food system has been architected by a handful of privileged people. Food sovereignty insists that this is illegitimate, because the design of our social system is not the privilege of the few, but the right of all. By summoning this language, food sovereignty demands that such rights be respected, protected, and fulfilled, as evinced through twin obligations of conduct and result (Balakrishnan and Elson 2008). It offers a way of fencing off particular entitlements, by setting up systems of duty and obligation.

Hannah Arendt and the right to have rights

Hannah Arendt is perhaps the most appropriate theorist to bring to bear here, not least because in her *Origins of Totalitarianism*, she makes an observation about rights strikingly similar to those motivating food sovereignty:

> . . . people deprived of human rights . . . are deprived, not of the right freedom, but of the right to action, not of the right to think whatever they please, but of the right to opinion. . . . We become aware of the existence of a right to have rights (and that means to live in a framework where one is judged by one's actions and opinions) and a right to belong to some kind of organized community, only when millions of people emerge who had lost and could not regain these rights because of the new global political situation. (Arendt 1967, 177)

Although referring to European Jewish refugees in the wake of World War II, her argument about how humans are rendered unable to effect change in the world around them by being excised from the state could also describe the contemporary context of food politics. Well, perhaps with the caveat that the political situation has *never* been favourable to those who produce food – its new global context merely compounds a millennia-old disenfranchisement.

But despite its apparent applicability, the language of rights does not come cheap, and it might not be well suited to the idea of food sovereignty. Central to the idea of rights is the idea that a state is ultimately responsible for guaranteeing the rights over its territory, because it is sovereign over it. As I have written elsewhere (Patel 2006), this understanding of the agency required for rights to proceed is something that Jeremy Bentham (2002, 330) has put rather directly: 'Natural rights is simple nonsense: natural and imprescriptible rights, rhetorical nonsense, – nonsense

upon stilts'. The argument that Bentham makes is simple – rights cannot be summoned out of thin air. For rights to mean anything at all, they need a guarantor, responsible for implementing a concomitant system of duties and obligations. Bentham, in other words, was pointing out that the mere declaration of a right does not mean that it is met – in his far more elegant terms, 'wants are not means; hunger is not bread' (Bentham 2002, 330). I have also argued elsewhere that one of the most radical moments in the definition of food sovereignty is the layering of different jurisdictions over which rights can be exercised. When the call is for, variously, nations, peoples, regions, and states to craft their own agrarian policy, there is a concomitant call for spaces of sovereignty. Food sovereignty has its own geographies, one determined by specific histories and contours of resistance. To demand a space of food sovereignty is to demand specific arrangements to govern territory and space. At the end of the day, the power of rights-talk is that rights imply a particular burden on a specified entity – the state. In blowing apart the notion that the state has a paramount authority, by pointing to the multivalent hierarchies of power and control that exist within the world food system, food sovereignty paradoxically displaces one sovereign, but remains silent about the others. To talk of a right to anything, after all, summons up a number of preconditions which food sovereignty, because of its radical character, undermines.

That there might be, in breach of Westphalian notions of state sovereignty, a class of people who were not covered by the territory of the state was a concern that troubled Arendt. Hence her analytical (and personal) interest in refugees, people stripped of nation-state membership, and people who were thus denied the ability to call on a state government's power to deliver and protect their rights. Yet, as Bentham suggests, talk of rights that exist simply because one is *human*, as Arendt argues for, is talk without substance. For who will guarantee the rights, for example, of those without a country? Who, for instance, guarantees the human rights of Palestinians, a people with a nation but no state?

Building on Arendt's work, Seyla Benhabib offers one of the more thoughtful extensions of the idea of human rights, in the tradition of Habermas. Benhabib discusses the notion of a 'right to rights' helpfully (Benhabib 2002). Without rehearsing her arguments, she ultimately makes the case for a Kantian politics of cosmopolitan federalism and moral universalism (Benhabib 2004). It is useful to see that the ideas of multiple 'democratic attachments' (Benhabib's term) can be attached to a longer tradition of political theory. But while expanding the conceptual resources available to discuss the existence of multiple and competing sovereignties, the Kantian call for cosmopolitan federalism and moral universalism looks very different under Benhabib's interpretation than advocates of food sovereignty might wish. For Benhabib, a good if imperfect working example of the kind of multiple and overlapping juridical sovereignties that are necessary to deal with the new political conjuncture is the European Union (Benhabib 2005). Within the EU, a citizen can appeal to government at municipal, regional, national, and Europe-wide levels, with each successive level trumping the ones below it. And, indeed, this looks like a very un-Westphalian system of rights provision. The cosmopolitan federalism element, with overlapping geographies over which one might claim rights, looks familiar in the definitions of food sovereignty.

But there is a problem. The European Union, despite its multi-faceted sovereignties, is not a place characterised by food sovereignty. Although, compared

with the United States, it offers comparatively better prospects for small-scale farmers, its Common Agricultural Policy is the subject of scathing critique from within Europe by members of Via Campesina. Such subsidies that do reach small scale farmers are crumbs from the table of a larger division of spoils between agribusinesses, and the fact that such crumbs are more plentiful in the EU than elsewhere does not, according to La Via Campesina, signal a democratic or accountable system. This is clearest in looking at the EU's Economic Partnership Arrangements, which violate the basic terms of food sovereignty in the Global South. This suggests that it is insufficient to consider only the structures that might guarantee the rights that constitute food sovereignty – it is also vital to consider the substantive policies, process, and politics that go to make up food sovereignty. In other words, a simple appeal to rights-talk cannot avoid tough questions around the substance and priority of those rights. In other words, while food sovereignty might be achieved through cosmopolitan federalism, if we are to understand what it looks like, we will need also to look at the second part of Benhabib's dyad – to moral universalism. Food sovereignty's multiple geographies have, despite their variety, a few core principles – and they are ones that derive from the politics through which Via Campesina was forged.

The trace of partial universality in Via Campesina

The history of Via Campesina has been well documented elsewhere (Desmarais 2007), but one of the central features that characterises the organisation is the in-principle absence of a policy-making secretariat. Integral to the functioning of Via Campesina is the absence of a sovereign authority dictating what any member organisation or country can do. This suspicion of policies imposed from above is unsurprising within Via Campesina, an organisation forged in resistance to autocratic and unaccountable policy making, largely carried out by the World Bank together with local elites. Yet no organisation can be a part of Via Campesina without subscribing to the organisation's principles. These principles provide the preconditions for participation in Via Campesina's politics, and it is not surprising that the principles should find their analogue in the definition of food sovereignty. Another return to the definitions shows that there are a number of preconditions before food sovereignty can be achieved. Bear in mind, of course, that food sovereignty itself is a precondition for food security. Yet before any of this can be attained, there are a number of non-negotiable elements, preconditions, if you will, for the preconditions for food security to exist.

The Nyéléni Declaration suggests that there are a range of conditions that are necessary for food sovereignty to obtain, such as a living wage, tenure security and security of housing, cultural rights, and an end to the dumping of goods below the cost of production, disaster capitalism (Klein 2007), colonialism, imperialism, and Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs), in the service of a future where, among other things, 'agrarian reform revitalises inter-dependence between consumers and producers' (Via Campesina 2007). Specifically, these changes include a commitment to women's rights, not merely over property but over a full spectrum of social, physical and economic goods.

It is here, I suggest, that we can use a feminist analysis to open a discussion around food sovereignty, specifically around the prioritisation of rights. Under neoliberalism, as Monsalve evocatively suggests (2006, 187), women's rights have become a Trojan Horse; the project of 'giving rights to women' has been conscripted

to spread a particular economic agenda founded on the primacy of *individual private property* rights. Other rights, such as those to education, healthcare, social assistance, and public investment derive, if at all, as rights secondary to individual private property. While women's rights to property are unarguably important, the attainment of these rights cannot be understood as a sufficient means to 'level the playing field for women' – in a country with equal rights to property for all, the fact that some have more resources than others, and therefore are able to command more property than others, reflects underlying, and persistent, inequalities in power that make the ability to trade property much less substantive than its neoliberal promoters would argue. This is no mere armchair theorising on my part. These conclusions were reached independently by members of Via Campesina at their fifth international conference in Maputo in 2008, at which a new slogan emerged: 'food sovereignty is about an end to violence against women'.

This base inequality in power is one that food sovereignty, sometimes explicitly, seeks to address. And it is here, in challenging deep inequalities of power, that I argue we see the core of food sovereignty. There is, at the heart of food sovereignty, a radical egalitarianism in the call for a multi-faceted series of 'democratic attachments'. Claims around food sovereignty address the need for social change such that the capacity to shape food policy can be exercised at all appropriate levels. To make those rights substantive requires more than a sophisticated series of juridical sovereignties. To make the right to shape food policy meaningful is to require that *everyone* be able substantively to engage with those policies. But the prerequisites for this are a society in which the equality-distorting effects of sexism, patriarchy, racism, and class power have been eradicated. Activities that instantiate this kind of radical 'moral universalism' are the necessary precursor to the formal 'cosmopolitan federalism' that the language of rights summons. And it is by these activities that we shall know food sovereignty.

Conclusion

The canvas on which inequalities of power need to be tackled is vast. It might be argued that in taking this aggressively egalitarian view, I have opened up the project of food sovereignty so wide that it becomes everything and nothing. In my defence, I would like to call on the Tanzanian political theorist, lawyer, and activist, Issa Shivji. In *Not Yet Democracy* (1998), his brilliant analysis of land reform in Tanzania, he addresses the question of what it will take for Tanzania to become a fully functioning democracy. He sees land reform as one of the central issues, and argues forcefully that for the franchise to be meaningful, resources need to be distributed as equally as the right to vote. In a poignant introduction to the book, he talks about how his daughters will grow up in a country that contains only the most cosmetic features of democracy, and that their ability to be full and active citizens will be circumscribed, because of the government's refusal to address the tough questions of resource distribution. Shivji's point is one that applies to the logic of food sovereignty, because both he and food sovereignty advocates are concerned, at the end of the day, with democracy. Egalitarianism, then, is not something that happens as a consequence of the politics of food sovereignty. It is a prerequisite to have the democratic conversation about food policy in the first place.

In taking this line, it looks like I am violating the first rule of food sovereignty. The genesis of the concept was designed precisely to prevent the kind

of pinning-down of interpretation that I attempt in this essay. But my interpretation does not pre-empt others, nor does it set in stone a particular political programme. In making my interpretation, I am merely identifying and making explicit some of the commitments that are already implicit in the definition of food sovereignty. If we talk about food sovereignty, we talk about rights, and if we do that, we must talk about ways to ensure that those rights are met, across a range of geographies, by everyone, in substantive and meaningful ways. In taking this line, I am clear that I come down on one side of a broader series of debates on the tension between individual and collective human rights, arguing that in cases where group rights threaten individual ones, individual ones ought to trump.

This is not likely to be an interpretation that goes down agreeably among all stakeholders. In taking this egalitarianism seriously, several important social relations need to be addressed. Via Campesina has already identified the home as one such locus of social relations; what else can it mean when food sovereignty calls for women's rights to be respected than that the patriarchal traditions that characterise every household and every culture must, without exception, undergo transformation. The relations between farmers and farmworkers, too, are ones that are characterised by structural inequalities in power. Quite how Via Campesina members address this is not my place to say, and that is as well, because I am very far from sure about the answer. But the fact that the question needs to be addressed is, to my mind, clear. Although the individual democratic movements within Via Campesina come at these issues from different starting points, traditions, and politics, it seems to me that the questions about power, complicity, and the profundity of a commitment to egalitarianism are ones that, by dint of their commitment to food sovereignty, the movements will ultimately have to address.

It is a challenge, as the papers in this special Grassroots Voices section demonstrate, that many have already taken up. To begin the discussion, we reproduce the Nyéléni Declaration on Food Sovereignty, which is followed by Hannah Wittman's interview with Paul Nicholson, one of the leading thinkers in Via Campesina. In this dialogue, Nicholson explains the philosophy of food sovereignty, strongly emphasising its democratic, procedural character. Food sovereignty is not something that can be forged by one person alone, nor, as Nicholson notes, can it be brought about exclusively by peasants, particularly in contexts where peasants form the political and social minority. This is explored further by Christina Schiavoni's account both of the Nyéléni Forum and the applications of food sovereignty not in rural Africa, but in urban New York City. Asking activists and workers in a range of community gardens about food sovereignty, she points to the rich potential that food sovereignty has for urban contexts in the Global North. Marcia Ishii-Eiteman adds further nuance and scope to food sovereignty by showing how a group of natural and social scientists who were tasked with tackling the future of global agriculture arrived at conclusions strikingly similar to those articulated by the peasants at the Nyéléni Forum. In recognising the ecological costs of industrial farming and the need for locally flexible policy in order to tackle future food crises, the International Agricultural Assessment of Knowledge, Science, and Technology for Development offers a rich and valuable complement to the political foundations of food sovereignty built by peasant groups. Finally, Rodgers Msachi, Laifolo Dakishoni, and Rachel Bezner Kerr present a concrete case study of moves toward food sovereignty in Malawi. The report of their experiences in developing the Soils, Food, and Healthy Communities project in northern Malawi shows the extent to

which food sovereignty is simultaneously about farming technology, democratic policymaking, public health, the environment, and gender, but also how the *process* of increasing food sovereignty is integral to its achievement. Together, these papers offer practical wisdom and analysis from activists in North America, Europe, and Africa, reminding us of the past contributions to justice and food sovereignty, as well as of the contributions that are yet to come, from the world's most organic intellectuals.

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Nyéléni Declaration on Food Sovereignty
27 February 2007, Nyéléni Village, Sélingué, Mali

Declaration of the Forum for Food Sovereignty, Nyéléni 2007

We, more than 500 representatives from more than 80 countries, of organizations of peasants/family farmers, artisanal fisherfolk, indigenous peoples, landless peoples, rural workers, migrants, pastoralists, forest communities, women, youth, consumers and environmental and urban movements have gathered together in the village of Nyéléni in Sélingué, Mali to strengthen a global movement for food sovereignty. We are doing this, brick by brick, as we live here in huts constructed by hand in the local tradition, and eat food that is produced and prepared by the Sélingué community. We give our collective endeavor the name 'Nyéléni' as a tribute to and inspiration from a legendary Malian peasant woman who farmed and fed her peoples well.

Most of us are food producers and are ready, able and willing to feed all the world's peoples. Our heritage as food producers is critical to the future of humanity. This is specially so in the case of women and indigenous peoples who are historical creators of knowledge about food and agriculture and are devalued. But this heritage and our capacities to produce healthy, good and abundant food are being threatened and undermined by neo-liberalism and global capitalism. Food sovereignty gives us the hope and power to preserve, recover and build on our food producing knowledge and capacity. Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations. It defends the interests and inclusion of the next generation. It offers a strategy to resist and dismantle the current corporate trade and food regime, and directions for food, farming, pastoral and fisheries